

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

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CHAPTER V. AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

"MOTHER, you never told us," said Frances, quietly; for her mother had trained her too well for her to forget to be dignified. "You never even hinted at such a possibility. It would have been such a pleasant thing to look forward to. But I cannot understand it. Is it really true?"

"I believe so. I wanted to avoid any of my children looking forward to uncertainty. So many things may happen to prevent the lawful owners enjoying their rights."

Mrs. Gordon smiled a little, and even Frances did not guess what a tumult of thought and excitement she was going through. For years she had kept this secret, and now at last she might mention it to her eldest daughter. Frances noticed that her mother's small white hand trembled a little as she held the paper, that was all.

"Besides, Frances, there is a curious and a very sad story attached to the life of this poor Mr. Gordon—a story which Minnie and Bee ought never to know. But you being the eldest, I shall of course tell you—that is, by-and-by."

Mrs. Gordon walked to the window and looked absently out of it, and then she continued:

"Of course, Frances, you must not mention this to any one till I find out it is true. Mr. Gordon may have made a will on his death-bed, he may have left his

money to——" she paused, and did not finish the sentence. "But a few years ago I ascertained, through indirect means, that he had made no will, and that he most likely intended the rightful relations to inherit his property."

"I do not understand, mother; this Mr. Gordon, was he a near relation, and has he no one belonging to him?"

"It is altogether a very sad and shocking history; he was not received in society."

Mrs. Gordon said these last words in a low, sad tone; she could say nothing worse of a man than this; for if "society," lenient enough for the sins of those within its pale, casts out one of them, what indeed must be his guilt! It was certainly past forgiveness.

"Ah!" answered Frances, in the same tone. "How terrible! No wonder you never mentioned him, mother. But isn't it tiresome that you sent that letter to Austin? He will be obliged to keep his engagement. If this is true you will want him; shall I write by this evening's post to him?"

Mrs. Gordon considered a moment, then said, quietly:

"No; if it is as I expect, I cannot upset his arrangements. The property comes to me, and not to Austin, and of course the lawyers have really the whole responsibility of the affairs. I am surprised that I have had no letter yet; anyhow, I will write to Mr. Blackston this morning." Mrs. Gordon gathered up her writing materials, and took the "Times" with her. "I shall go to my own room, Frances. Do not let any one disturb me till luncheon time."

She walked slowly away, and Frances looked after her mother with honest pride. No one, she thought, had such a graceful

bearing; no one in Longham was so thoroughly a lady as was her mother. Then, how clever she was; did she not manage all the business matters of the family? Had she not, without help, made them what they were, the most sought-after young ladies in the neighbourhood? And now this wonderful secret about this money, her mother had kept it to herself so that they might not be disappointed if the realisation never came to pass; and her wisdom had prevented them from growing up useless and extravagant.

"I dare say it has made all the difference to Austin. How hard he has worked all his life, and what a dear, good fellow he is; never extravagant because he knows mother cannot afford much expense for him. Yes, indeed, she has been good. If only I might tell Minnie!"

The present had now to be thought of, so Frances once more picked up the ball-dress, and tried to begin working again.

"Perhaps next year we shall not have to slave away if we wish to appear nicely dressed," she thought, a little smile of intense satisfaction lighting up her face. Certainly it would be pleasant, very, very pleasant, to be rich; but then her mother had given her no particulars, and there seemed to be some unpleasant history attached to this fortune. What did that matter, so that in the end they, this highly respected family of Gordons, became possessed of it?

Frances's meditations did not stop till a merry little clatter of voices and doors made itself heard, and the two Misses Gordon entered the drawing-room full of stories about the delightful walk they had had.

"But of course the ice would not bear," said Minnie, laughing. "I believe Captain Grant just invented that to make us take the walk; and fancy, Frances, he walked all the way back with us!"

At another time this would have been interesting news, but to-day Frances only thought: "He is a very long time making up his mind about Minnie; but when she has money she can marry anybody she likes," and Frances looked at her sister with almost a new interest. How pretty she was! Her figure was as nearly perfect as it could be; her small neck was like an exquisite slender column; her head round and small, surrounded with an abundance of fair hair. She and Bee were outwardly much alike, but the youngest Miss Gordon had a deep-cut brow, shading grey eyes,

which, though not large, were full of expression. "Sweet and womanly" would have been the words used by those who wished to describe Beatrice Gordon's expression apart from her beauty. Minnie was perhaps the prettiest, but the expression of her face was quite different. She was a decided flirt, though her bringing-up had forbidden flirting; so she hid as much as possible her airs and graces from her family. Minnie had had many flirtations, but they did not count; one had been with a penniless curate, another with a penniless officer; this latter still worshipped her, but then he was in Ireland, so Minnie did not think much of him. To-day she had settled that Captain Grant was a different personage. In the first place, he was an only son; in the second, he was not quite young, being past thirty; and then he was respected and looked up to by every one who knew him; lastly, he was a thorough gentleman, so courteous, so good, so handsome. Yes, there was no doubt about it, the woman whom he loved would be a woman to be envied.

"I wonder which of us he admires the most; but Bee might not make him a good wife," thought Minnie. "She is quite a child still, and has really few ideas beyond enjoying herself and being nicely dressed. She never can understand about people, and things, and the future, as Frances and I do."

"Where's mother?" asked Minnie, aloud, looking round the room; "and oh, Frances! how little you have done to your dress! You will never be able to finish it in time! Whatever has made you so long? Did any one call?"

Frances blushed as she answered "No." So that Minnie, always of a curious disposition, at once concluded that some one had, if not called, at least "put in an appearance."

"Mother never writes upstairs unless she has something very particular to do. I wonder what it is?"

"Austin wrote about his not coming home. He means to tutor a youth and he is to start at once for Germany."

"He is not coming home!" cried Beatrice.

"It is to save mother any further expense," said the elder sister, reprovingly. "Of course all this year he was obliged to have rather more money than usual."

"It's horrid being poor," sighed Minnie. "I mean to marry a rich man, and then

you two can come and stay with me and have some fun."

"What nonsense! I do not see why we should not be left independent, even if you do marry Croesus," said Bee, a little crossly, as she walked away.

Something Minnie had said had jarred on her. Did her sister in any way mean to allude to Captain Grant? Just as Beatrice reached the hall the front-door bell rang, so that Beatrice could not escape before she found herself confronting Captain Grant himself.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Gordon; but I fancy this silk scarf is yours. Did you drop one? A woman gave it to me as I was going home."

The maid retired, and Beatrice blushed a little with the surprise of seeing the Captain again—moreover, just as she was thinking of him—so she hesitated before owning her lost possession.

"Yes, I took it in case we skated, to put on afterwards. How careless of me! Thank you. Won't you come in? Mother is in."

"No, thank you." (A pause.) "You are not tired, I hope. It was my fault, taking you all that way on false pretences."

"No; I did enjoy the walk so much, and so did Minnie!"

Captain Grant had entered, and now stood in the hall rather as if he were on parade duty, and Beatrice were his commanding officer.

"I am very glad your sister enjoyed the walk. Are you quite sure she is not tired?"

"Not a bit tired. We often walk farther than that."

"Next week my aunt is coming to stay with us, and then I hope you will come to the Towers. It is very dull having no lady to take the head of the house; but when my aunt is here my father means to make the old place gay. Do you think your sister—I mean your sisters—will come and help us?"

"I am sure they will," answered Bee, looking up almost sadly.

After all, it was Minnie he was thinking of and asking for; and all this morning, for the first time since she had known Captain Grant, she had fancied that he was thinking chiefly of herself, and she had suddenly dreamt a little dream of happiness, and of making herself more worthy of him. This seemed the first thought when one looked or spoke of

Captain Grant. All he said was so quiet, so serious, that one recognised at once his earnestness. He did not, as most officers Bee had met, pay very broad compliments or try to look fascinating, twirling at the same time the inevitable moustache; neither did he show an ostentatious politeness to one woman and forget the commonest courtesies to all others, especially old maids. On the contrary, this Captain Grant, wherever he might be, always looked round to see whether the elder ladies were seated, whether they had some one to talk to, or whether they were placed in a draught. If he saw a very old lady rising, he offered her his arm to cross the room, so that his less polite fellow-officers privately called him Sir Charles Grandison; but all the same, his influence in his regiment—and he had much—was always exercised for good; and though some might laugh at him, yet all respected him.

Beatrice was silent for a few minutes when she had said to herself, "after all it was Minnie." She was not jealous, but a little sadness came into her heart; she had looked up to the Captain, though it was only a month ago he had come back to his father on furlough—only a month ago—yet all his actions had impressed themselves on the youngest Miss Gordon as something different from any she had seen before. He certainly did like one of them, she thought, for he was too truthful to be able to hide his feelings, but Beatrice was at this moment puzzled as to which of them it was.

He did not stay any longer now, perhaps because he heard a door being opened, or perhaps because he had nothing more to say; and when he had gone, Beatrice went slowly upstairs trying to stifle any little jealous feeling that arose in spite of herself about Minnie.

As she passed her mother's door, it was suddenly opened, and Mrs. Gordon said, quickly:

"Come in a minute, Frances, I want to consult you about—"

"It is Beatrice, mother," answered the girl. "Can I do as well as Frances?"

"Oh, no—never mind; but stop a minute, before you take off your things, I wish you would post these letters for me; do it yourself, they are important." Beatrice assented and went downstairs, taking the letters in her hand. When she was just going to slip them into the post-box, she noticed the address of one of them.

"That is to mother's lawyer; I hope it does not mean he is coming here, horrid little man. Mother says he is clever; all the same, I cannot bear him." Then Beatrice posted the letters and hurried indoors in order to be in time for luncheon.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MIDST OF A BALL-DRESS.

THE next morning Frances had a headache, and sent word to Beatrice that she would be much obliged if her sister would go down and make the coffee for her. Minnie never came downstairs till the last minute of grace, and Mrs. Gordon was not allowed by her affectionate daughters to perform any little household duties which they could do as well. When the message reached Beatrice she was already dressed, having risen early for two reasons: firstly, because she had not slept well with those words ringing in her ears, "it was Minnie after all," and secondly, because she had been so much surprised to see how little Frances had done to her ball-dress, that she was determined to help her by working at it for her before breakfast.

"Poor Frances!" thought Beatrice; "she has to hear about all the worries, so I think that being the youngest and the most stupid I ought to help her."

She ran downstairs to the dining-room, took out the work, and sat down to it with much diligence. The Gordons had only one fire lighted in the morning, to avoid expense; in the afternoon they all migrated to the drawing-room, but there, of course, no dress-making on a large scale could be undertaken.

All the time Minnie, who never did anything for any one which she could possibly help doing, her mother excepted, was sleeping soundly upstairs, the housemaid was busy in the drawing-room, so the house seemed comparatively quiet as the young girl, sitting as close to the fire as possible, stitched away in solitude. How few of the Longham folk could have guessed that one of the pretty Misses Gordon had to work on a chilly November morning, in order to appear and to help her sisters to appear as one of the Longham "belles" in the evening!

This same thought entered Bee's mind and she smiled over it, though after the smile came a little sigh.

"I don't believe Captain Grant guesses how much we think about our clothes. I expect he would despise us very much if

he knew; and, besides, I never see him staring critically at us as some of the officers do—he looks straight into one's face when he speaks, and seems to expect the answer quite seriously. I wish I could say something nice or original, or something even worth listening to; but Minnie is more amusing than I am, she says such funny things about other people that one can't help laughing."

This soliloquy was interrupted by the postman's knock, and in a few minutes the housemaid brought in the letters. Beatrice, sitting near her mother's place, saw two business-looking envelopes placed on her plate, but thought very little more of them, for a letter was placed in her own hands. With a sort of dazed feeling, she opened the envelope and read these words:

"DEAR MISS GORDON,—I believe the ice will really bear to-morrow. At all events in our shallow ponds there will be no danger. I shall give myself the pleasure of calling at your house to-morrow morning, however, to report on the state of things in order to spare you a useless walk, should the weather change during the night. I hope Mrs. Gordon and your sisters will give us the pleasure of their company; lunch will be provided for the skaters under a tent.—Yours most truly, COLIN GRANT."

Although Beatrice read this very matter-of-fact letter several times, she could not but acknowledge to herself that except for the direction on the envelope, the contents might have been equally suitable for each of the three Misses Gordon. Still he had written to her, Beatrice, and if after all—She would have liked to linger over these thoughts; but she remembered the dress and set to work again diligently, when, to her surprise, the maid reappeared, saying: "If you please, Miss Beatrice, mistress wishes to have her letters taken upstairs to her."

Never in all her life could Beatrice remember her mother sending for her letters. She had constantly told her daughters that she disapproved of the practice, and that it showed an impatient and undisciplined character to be unable to wait for one's correspondence till one came downstairs.

Of course, Beatrice handed the two official-looking envelopes to the maid without further remark, but nevertheless she said to herself:

"Something very extraordinary must have happened. Mother did not have her

letters sent up to her even when she was expecting to hear whether Austin had taken his degree."

However much the youngest Miss Gordon might wonder, her curiosity was not to be satisfied. Mrs. Gordon, Frances, and Minnie appeared rather later than usual, but no remarks were made on the post except about Captain Grant's note, which Beatrice rather unwillingly gave up.

"I shall not skate to-day," said Frances, decidedly. "I must finish my dress for the ball, there are only two more days. I suppose yours is quite ready, Minnie?"

It was Minnie's turn to go out, for the three girls never appeared together.

"Yes, I shall wear my pink silk. Mother, may we go this morning to the ponds?" Mrs. Gordon was quieter than usual, but her two younger daughters did not notice it; now, however, she looked up quickly to answer Minnie's question.

"You can go, Minnie, with Mrs. Crozby, but Beatrice had better stay at home and work at Frances' dress—that is, one of you two must do so, as I want Frances to help me upstairs with some business." Minnie blushed with vexation.

"We could help her to-night;" but Mrs. Gordon's will was law, she never allowed her opinion to be questioned, and as she seldom interfered with their pleasures, the three had learnt to obey without much questioning.

To-day, however, it was really too trying, because Minnie knew that Beatrice had done already her share, and that, in fairness, she ought to be the one to stay behind; but then what a chance she would miss of making herself agreeable to Captain Grant, the heir of the Towers, and quite the most important and eligible young man in Longham! Beatrice had said nothing. She felt that if only Minnie would act fairly, she, Beatrice, would not lose her great pleasure; but then—no one knew Minnie better than Beatrice. All her life she had had to give way and accept Minnie's petty tyrannies—tyrannies which were exercised with a sweet smile or a "You can do it, can't you, Bee?" But to-day it appeared harder than ever; harder, because she could not offer any excuse for her desire to take her sister's place.

Mrs. Gordon was too much occupied to notice the little episode except by saying:

"You must settle it among yourselves, girls. Frances, I shall want you to help me in half an hour."

The ladies separated to their various occupations, and Beatrice, resolutely taking up her sister's gown, shed one or two tears on the thin material.

There was no doubt about the frost to-day. Another bright, crisp November morning; the Longham gentlemen meeting at the station walked briskly up and down the platform and exchanged remarks about the various degrees of frost registered during the night in divers nooks and corners of their villas or mansions. The daughters at home talked of skating costumes or the most convenient style of skate; the mothers alone grumbled about the bitter cold, and had anxious thoughts about frozen pipes. Life was not made up of many grand ideas among these villa residents, but of practical comforts which had been earned by past years of privations, and the remembrance of this past made the present feel more snug and comfortable. Let the thermometer register what degree of frost it liked, it would not freeze up the balance at the banker's, and coals could be purchased in proportion to the cold.

One melancholy worker, sitting alone in the dining-room of Eastview Villa, thought, too, about the skating; but it was of her sister's pleasure. She had seen her go off with the Crozby's, radiant with happiness, nodding to her and saying as a parting consolation:

"It is a pity you cannot come too. It all comes of Frances putting off her things till the last minute."

Bee had been obliged to bite her lip to prevent herself saying something cross. The motive was not a high one—simply: "I don't think Captain Grant would appreciate a girl who could not give up her own will sometimes;" but it served Beatrice's purpose, and she was able to nod her good-bye to Minnie without the tears appearing on the surface. "Tears, idle tears," she said, smiling, remembering how at other times she could sing the song with a smile on her lips.

The house relapsed into silence, and Bee was left alone. Stitch, stitch, stitch; the dress was beginning to take a form; the maker became interested in her work. Even the vision of the shallow ponds at the Towers faded from her mind, till suddenly there came a ring at the bell, and before Beatrice could remonstrate with the maid, Captain Grant was ushered into the dining-room, and discovered Beatrice surrounded by a cloud of light

material, and pins, cottons, and scissors strewn about her.

She blushed deeply, from surprise, pleasure, and shyness, as he spoke.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Gordon, but I only came to see if I could not persuade you to alter your mind. Your sister said you did not care to come out this morning."

There was a slight emphasis on the word "care," as if the soldier wished to find out the truth, and truth was more natural to Bee than falsehood, even though Mrs. Gordon often said to her daughters that it was often very unnecessary and unladylike to give one's exact reason for one's actions.

"I did want to come very much, but one of us was obliged to stay and finish this—this work." The Captain made no comment, and appeared almost sorry to have forced Beatrice to give an explanation; then, without any awkward apology, he turned the conversation.

"This frost is certainly going to continue, my father says, and he considers himself very learned on the subject of weather. I hope you will still get some good skating; but perhaps," he added, glancing at the flimsy material, "dancing is more in your line."

"Yes, dancing is delightful, but this is for Frances; she and Minnie are going to the Leighs' ball on Thursday. I am the youngest, so I do not get as much dancing as the others; we can't go out all three together."

"Why not?" asked the Captain, innocently.

"Because it would not be the—thing, I suppose; people would say the three Misses Gordon filled up the room," and then Beatrice laughed heartily.

"I have been so long away from England that now and then, I fear, my ideas are old-fashioned. Society seems to me to be getting so much more a studied affair than formerly. People do not go out for amusement, but for all kinds of other motives."

Beatrice was conscious of a new feeling; she recognised that Captain Grant was real, that all he said was not spoken because it was "the right thing to say." The girl had been brought up so much on the other principle, that the difference struck her forcibly to-day. She was thinking, as her heart beat a little faster than usual, "he came really to see me, to-day," and then she recollected that she ought to tell her mother that this visitor

was here, that her mother would object to such an early call, and also that her pleasant talk would be over. She would, however, first make one remark:

"I believe you always say what you think, Captain Grant, without caring about society."

"No, not always, but I hope I do not say what I hold to be false; for instance, I will not say I am sorry you are not coming, because I fancy you are 'on duty.' Forgive the military expression."

"I had been grumbling very much to myself about being 'on duty.' I suppose soldiers never do that! Anyhow, thank you for coming to see; perhaps I shall lose all my——" She did not know how to end, for the Captain rose, feeling he ought not to intrude any further.

"The thought of you will make me feel what an idle creature an officer on furlough is, Miss Gordon," he said, smiling and holding out his hand; "however, I have learnt this morning that women can speak the truth."

Beatrice again blushed with pleasure, for the tone was too gentlemanly for her to take offence at the words, and yet she felt that his praise was almost undeserved. However, when he was gone the youngest Miss Gordon registered a vow.

"I always will speak the truth now, and act it too."

VENETIAN LIFE.

THE Venetians take life easily, though they do now and again affect to get prodigiously excited. During the first ten minutes of my acquaintance with the stout, dark-eyed lady whose tenant I was subsequently for two months, she stormed and made such a bother about a few francs, more or less, per month, that I expected the house would always be in an uproar on her account. But it was by no means so. When we had come to our agreement, and she had straddled her nose with glasses, to put her name to the paper, she suddenly became as calm as the lagoon outside; and that calm she maintained all the rest of the time. I thought she would stay in my mind as a picturesque sort of Fury. Instead of that, I think of her as I used to see her most often: lolling about her fine, wide, stone staircase, with a cigarette between her pearly teeth, and casting her salutations to the right and left among her various clients.

There was a dustman who used to come into the corte every morning, to take away the rubbish from the four doors that opened into the place. He was a very gentle old dustman, and not at all a martyr to his profession. I used to gaze at him while I was shaving. When he had set his barrow on one side and put his broom in it, he would fumble in his pocket for his snuff-box. This he would open, inspect, and smell deliberately, raising his thankful countenance to heaven after the indulgence. Then he would take up the dust at the doors; and, before departing, he would once again gratify his nose with a pinch. He even picked the grains of snuff off his labelled arm, and enjoyed them separately rather than run the risk of wasting them. You would have thought a gentleman of his line of life would have had no desire to vex his nostrils with any superfluous irritant. But the way he dallied over the pleasure told a different tale.

It is the same with the other inhabitants of the dear old city. I do not admire the Venetian boatmen half as much as most people, who know them only in Mr. Gilbert's operetta, affect to do. They are not heroic and lovely all through; nor is their devotion to duty or the fair anything like as constant as their devotion to franc-pieces. But when the mood is on them, they are deliciously idle—hardly to be stirred into action by the bribe of a large silver crown. They much prefer to sit in a cluster on the marble steps by their gondolas, gossiping airily about nothing in particular, and looking as impudently well-to-do as the fat pigeons, which roost about the golden pinnacles of the Cathedral of San Marco what time they have had enough of the Indian corn with which thoughtless visitors from America and Great Britain are ever ready to stuff them. In their more active moments, the handsome, bronzed fellows are all civility and smiles to the emotional, elderly ladies from Germany and elsewhere, who approach them and comment audibly to each other on their fine manly beauty and magnificent complexions. "Did you ever see such a delightful mixture of burnt sienna and apple rose?" "Never! my dear. His cheeks are perfect pictures; and then his eyes—so large and liquid—almost like a gazelle's, only, of course, so much darker and more passionate!" The gondolier has enough knowledge of foreign languages to feel these strange compli-

ments, and he shows his teeth amiably at the ladies. And afterwards he clamours at them for their patronage, which, however, they withhold.

Yet, if they had the needful courage, they could not do better than get aboard the black little boat, and allow themselves to be propelled lightly into mid-canal. For it is on the water in Venice that one understands best of all the feeling of pleasant, calm inertia, which seems to pervade the people and the place. The tall houses, with their stone faces and green shutters, glide by like buildings in a dream; and there is no sound save the subdued washing of the water against the swaying sides of the boat. Now and again a gondola comes in the opposite direction. First, the glitter of its bevelled steel prow, then the body of the thing, with, perhaps, a fair face behind the glass of the cabin, and afterwards the bending oarsman. When it has gone, there is a recurrence of the same marble palaces towering towards the blue; bridges, and, at intervals, other gondolas. It is impossible to take such a city altogether seriously.

I was one of many inhabitants of a great house, the lower windows of which were heavily barred. Perhaps, two hundred years back, it was the palace of a very important nobleman; but, if so, no trace of him was left. The very paintings on the ceiling to the rooms had all been done over again, and the artist of the nineteenth century was not a very clever fellow. But the size of the rooms was, of course, unchanged; and for this I was grateful to the builder.

It is wonderful how cheaply a man may live in Venice if he will. Even the hotels are not so exacting as the hotels elsewhere. No one, however, to whom the p's and q's of life in Italy are tolerably familiar, should trouble the Venetian hotels. It is so much more unconstrained to have chambers. The big key, which makes one free of the house at all hours of the day and night, is certainly an encumbrance to the pocket; but then it relieves one from so many other encumbrances. It was all one whether I entered the corte at eight o'clock or one o'clock, except, perhaps, in the matter of the ghostly tenants of the vast echoing hall upon which the door swung from the outside.

Twice or thrice I was set adrift in the fair city at uncanny hours about daybreak, when the coral light of the east was but just beginning to break through the pale grey mist over the lagoon. This is not ordi-

narily an interesting hour in a city; but in Venice I found it so. In the first place, the flower-girls were then at their busiest in the market by the Rialto Bridge, and the perfume of lilies and hyacinths was at its freshest. Secondly, one could at pleasure then recast the inhabitants of Venice, and make them of what century one pleased for the entertainment of the fancy, in harmony with the different buildings. Instead of a long tail of black-coated youths bustling up and down the streetlets between the Square of San Marco and the Rialto, just as if they were in Cheapside—the common spectacle on an ordinary business day—one could attire one's people in the silks, and satins, and velvets which Venice of old loved so well before the era of sumptuary laws, and which gave such bewitching interest to the old city.

There is just a trace of the survival of some of this obsolete picturesqueness in the funerals of celebrities even in our day. This "palazzo" on the water-side, with the parti-coloured mob massing on both sides of the canal near it, is in mourning, and the funeral of the senator whose name it bears is about to be achieved. What a pretty sight is that long line of gondolas in the water, each laden with one lovely wreath of flowers, or many wreaths! In these gondolas Venetians of distinction are waiting to follow the hearse-gondola when it shall set out for the island cemetery away from Venice. Those old men, too, in claret-coloured uniforms and peaked caps, each with a long candle in his hand, lighted and clogging with grease; and those boys, in scarlet and white, also carrying candles! The old fellows, who owe much to the charity of the dead senator, are out of humour with their responsibilities this day. They don't scruple to quarrel with each other while they wait for the corpse, call each other very impolite names, and, in a sly way, drop the hot grease on each other's tender old toes. It is the same with the urchins. And from the other side of the canal the criticisms of the mob upon the group of fat clergy, who, also with candles in their hands, very considerably add to the bulk of the expectant crowd, descend into the midst of the mourners, but little mellowed into pleasantness by distance. The modern Venetian in low life does not like to remember the past days, when he was in such fear and terror of his parish priest. He atones for it by believing all that the daily press says in abuse of the Church, and by retailing

such abuse in the coarse, hearty way characteristic of an emotional populace all the world over.

Some think there is now no passion in Venice—only sensibility. There is probably less passion than there used to be, but there is still quite enough to keep the warm blood pulsing through Venetian bodies three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. It shows itself in the energy with which Venetians hate what formerly they loved and feared, and in the two or three stern tragedies per week which take place in the poorer quarters of the city.

I much mistake if the two daughters of my Venetian landlady could not upon due provocation have shown that they, like their sisters elsewhere, have sharp talons under their smooth clouded skins. For all that, they were to me consistently gentle and pacific. One of them who found it most convenient used to call me in the morning—sometimes in curl-papers, I admit—and give me a most dulcet greeting with as sweet a smile as a human face may conjure to itself before breakfast time. Anon, the other or the maid would come and light the stove and bring the roll and coffee. The maid was a thoroughbred Venetian of the style Paolo Veronese has painted many times. Her eyes were blue, and her hair was like spun gold. She was somewhat loose of shape, and not always very cleanly of person. But she had a gift of smiling hardly to be equalled; and she had agreeable phrases on her rosy lips whenever she came to do me service, however menial. She was not an honest handmaid, as we in England make estimate by honesty. But as they go in Venice, she need not be blamed inordinately. She stole nothing of price; but contented herself with lesser pickings and stealings, such as she might reasonably expect would never be missed. Daily she seemed to taste my liqueurs, for instance, and in this gradual way she at length wholly consumed one bottle which I had but opened and tried on the palate. Her wonder at what had become of it when I amused myself by examining it, and commenting upon its evaporated aspect in her presence, was most successful acting; and I forgave her the crime on the strength of her ancestry, which was vague, and therefore not likely to impress her with our notions of moral responsibility.

Venice is not a city in which to do much serious work. Somehow, the atmosphere is against all such effort. I believe there

are two or three artists and writers of repute in the place; but I do not envy them their daily conflict with the spirit of disinclination which must strive hard to keep them aloof from canvas and manuscript. It is a city in which people who depend on the public for a livelihood, find it enough if they do but sit in front of or behind their wares. Thence they are quite willing to answer the enquiries of possible purchasers; and if the enquiries eventuate in a sale—well and good. For the rest, it is not a matter for repining, if the prospector goes his way without buying aught.

The Venetians work their hardest from half-past two until five in the afternoon. This is the time when the band plays in the charming Square of San Marco. Such fashionable folks as then abide in the city, come forth into the Square from the gondola stage hard by. The ladies are as elegant as their taste will allow them to be, and the gentlemen are exquisite dandies of a ridiculous type. They do not, it must be said, possess anything like as much beauty of face or form as one expects in them. The dark eyes and long hair of the ladies are, I suppose, worthy of notice, though blue eyes also are to be seen; but their deportment is much against them. It requires a considerable stay in the city to get accustomed to them. By that time perhaps they may appear as fascinating as they would like to be held.

The Venetian youths, like their cousins in Rome, are fond of dogs; and the uglier and more forbidding the dog, so much the more does it seem to be admired. This has a very odd result. The gentlemen wear their boots long in the sole and curved upwards, a mode which does not improve their personal appearance. When very exquisite indeed, they further attire themselves in tall silk hats, lemon-coloured kid gloves, and collars that rise almost to their lips. Then, with a dapper cane, and a poodle shaven so brutally clean that no lock of wool is left upon it, save at the tip of its tail, the gentleman considers himself completed for promenade. Up and down he goes, bowing zealously to the right hand and the left, ever and anon stopping to caress the tips of the fingers of a lady, and ever and anon pausing to unwind the chain of his poodle from his elegant legs. He is an expert at expletives; but the poodle is used to them, and bears without one whine of objection all the abuse it excites.

The more aged Venetians sit in the cafés under the colonnade, and admire the young men, their sons and grandsons, and wish they too were young again, and as able to enjoy life and bewitch the ladies as their more fortunate posterity.

And to and fro among the crowd of the seated and the promenading, go those rather audacious damsels, the flower-girls, eager for patronage. It is in vain that the more noble of the ladies look with disdain at their assaults upon the button-holes of the gentlemen. They are perhaps the most strenuous seekers of lucre in Venice. If you repulse them once they try again five minutes afterwards. Nor is there any reproach or malice in their brilliant eyes when, only at the third or fourth appeal, you bow to your fate, and allow them to pin the flower to your coat with their own plump hands. One could forgive the girls their pertinacity in the public thoroughfare, if they would but leave one in peace at one's meals; but this they decline to do. They have the run of the restaurants, and so with one's soup or macaroni one has to endure a good deal of annoyance.

The band is delightful, of course. Italy is a musical country, and the blue skies go well with her instruments. So up and down the people go, now facing the brilliantly coloured Basilica of San Marco, and anon turned towards the Palladian buildings which enclose the Square. The pigeons are lively when the music plays. Perhaps they love sweet sounds; more probably they know that this is the time in the day when they are most sure of a surfeit. The pretty American girls, whose fond parents are hurrying them through the Old World, must be able to show their "folks at home" that they have fed the famous birds. The demand for Indian corn is therefore sometimes brisk while the band plays; and the photographer from the corner is sufficiently willing to turn his focus upon the pretty girl, as she stands with her back to the Cathedral, with a pigeon on each shoulder, and one bloated glutton of a bird perched upon one hand, while it pecks vigorously at the grain in the palm of the other hand.

I used to love to watch the movement of the lights upon San Marco's ornate pile, as that time of promenade drew towards a close. The gold of the sun as it sank into the west crept from glass window to leaden dome, and from one leaden dome to another, until at length it was

held by no part of the building except the many gilt vanes which becrest the various pinnacles above the domes and windows. There it would stay while one paced the length of the Square—no longer; and afterwards it would climb the tall campanile by the side of the Basilica, linger for a moment on the faces of the exalted tourists who had ascended the building to see Venice and the Alps, linger for another moment on the campanile's highest point, and then vanish until the morrow. And out over the placid lagoon one might also watch its vanishing, from the red buildings of one island to the red buildings of another island; from white sail to white sail; and so on to the puffy wisps of cloud in the sky. Save from some vantage point or watch-tower of the city, one could not ordinarily see the glow far away on the snow of the Alps, ere night was thoroughly heralded by the stars overhead.

I have said that Venice is a cheap city. So it is; and especially if you dine with the people in the fish kitchens of the Street of the Smiths. There you get a slice of smoking polenta, as broad as a gondolier's palm and somewhat thicker, for a penny. Another penny will, if fish be abundant, as it generally is, buy a plateful of very palatable fry. Add to this a third penny for half a litre of wine, and the bill is told. There is no doubting the nutrition in such a meal. The faces of the clients of the shops in the Street of the Smiths are plump and hearty, and the clients themselves are not famishingly impatient to be served when there is a crush, as there often is of an evening, when such work as Venice does is mostly at an end.

The waiters in the more accredited restaurants here seem to have a warm motherliness of demeanour which one may look for in vain elsewhere. There were two of them in particular where I made my evening meals. One was very tall and thin, and the other was short and fat, and with a club-foot. The taller one was all humility and gentleness—"What would your Excellency please to fancy this evening?" for example; or "If your Excellency would condescend to give an eye to the fried calves' brains by-and-by, your Excellency would not regret it"; and so on. With his companion, amiability took a more genial turn. The little fellow would, notwithstanding his club-foot, speed towards an habitual guest, and catch him ere

he made a movement to free himself from his overcoat. This was a duty he made peculiarly his; and when he had duly, and with reverent regard, hung the garment by the neck, he would stoop his pleasant little face towards his client, and ask, emotionally, about the gentleman's health. The remedies this excellent little fellow has suggested to me for a disturbance of the liver or a touch of catarrh would hardly be believed; and he was always surprisingly sympathetic when he could conscientiously congratulate the guest upon the re-establishment of his health. One day I had the honour to entertain, under his care, two Anglo-Saxon ladies, travelling acquaintances. On the morrow I asked him why he was so inordinately attentive to the younger and much the more beautiful of these ladies. "Is she not, then, to be the signor's 'sposa'?" he asked, opening his eyes as at a miracle. "By no means," said I. "Oh, and I thought it might be," observed Pietro, with a die-away sigh of disappointment; "for she was truly beautiful, and with so much gold about her neck."

One is disposed to imagine, indeed, that some of the Venetian men are rather too effeminate. They owe it to their shop-keeping ancestors and to the Austrians, I suppose. A good rousing war would perhaps be the making of them. They are just a little too content to be the very obedient servants of the various Tomnoddys who come to Venice from the North to spend their money and be enchanted. With such restricted ambitions in their souls, the germs of many gracious and robust virtues which assert themselves in other people do not seem with them to get out of the embryonic stage. Were I a lady in dread of mad dogs, I should never, for instance, look to a Venetian to stand between me and the infuriated monster in the hour of need. The little fellow would be ready to melt almost away in the ardour of his sympathy—after the disaster. There would be no end to the intensity of his grief, and the hot tears from his beautiful dark eyes would perchance fall pit-a-pat upon the pavement for five minutes in succession. This would be very laudable in him, but still it would be indicative of a void somewhere. The true grit of manhood would be wanting.

The best of it is, however, that, as a rule, there are no mad dogs in the narrow street-lets of the dear old city; and there is no stout call upon the more vigorous virtues of the people to prove them wanting. One

is quite content to seek these more ennobling qualities in the history of the old Venetian State, and in the historical and other scenes which Venice's wonderful artists have painted in her famous halls and palaces. It is with nations as with people: they have their heroic and their quiet and seemingly trivial epochs. If, for successive centuries, a State declares itself great in word and in deed, it may be allowed, at the end of the time, to slumber a while; and no man ought, then, to reproach it for its inactivity. There was no pretence about the greatness of Venice a few hundred years ago. That ought to be set to the credit of the modern denizens of the city who, for no apparent fault of their own, have been born at a time when the city has no separate and proud national life. For my part, if I were a Venetian, I should feel much as I imagine the man feels who, after much exertion, at length, when he is old, realises that he is rich. Toils are over; the pleasures of retrospect have begun. Seated among soft, luxurious cushions, I should dwell with pleasure upon my past admirable efforts. Though in the eyes of the dull and the ignorant I might appear an uninteresting old creature, with my grey beard and nervous totter, I should not mind one jot. A man is what he feels himself to be.

So with the modern Venetian. He may be content to seem small, and even ridiculous, to the large, assuming people of the North, for he has the conviction at heart that he has been what they aspire to become.

OUR NATIONAL PORTRAITS.

THE days are now happily numbered in which a collection of portraits, the interest and importance of which to the student of our English history can hardly be over-estimated, is destined to remain in obscurity, more than half-forgotten by ordinary people, in the heart of the East End of London. Though the dwellers in that vast section of our metropolis are by no means incapable of appreciating art—as the eager and intelligent visitors to Mr. Barnett's admirable exhibitions at St. Jude's bear eloquent witness—it must be owned that a gallery of portraits alone is not calculated to attract the less educated part of the community so much as pictures which, by their beauty of colour, and por-

trayal of heroic, or pathetic, or familiar scenes, appeal more directly to the feelings or the experience. Hence the upper gallery of the Bethnal Green Museum, where our national portraits have hung for the last five years, is the resort mainly of small children from the neighbouring streets, who amuse themselves there when the weather is unfavourable for playing out of doors.

The collection thus relegated to obscurity is in many respects a remarkable one; and not the least striking fact connected with it is the shortness of time in which so large and so fairly representative a series has been acquired. It is only thirty-five years since the gallery was founded, and already it numbers over eight hundred portraits, although those acquired since 1885 have not been sent to Bethnal Green, and consequently are not accessible to the public. Established in 1856, through the exertions of Earl Stanhope, and with the co-operation of the Prince Consort, Lord Ellesmere's gift of the Chandos Shakespeare at once conferred dignity on the enterprise; and the collection has steadily grown in size and importance, while the salutary restrictions adopted by the trustees against the introduction of mediocrities and nobodies have kept it fairly representative. It was rightly laid down that "There ought not to be in this collection a single portrait as to which a man of good education passing round, and seeing the name in the catalogue, would be under the necessity of asking, 'Who is he?'" and that "the success of the whole scheme depended on confining the gallery to men of real distinction, of real fame." If the gallery is to maintain a high national character, care must be taken that these restrictions are not unduly relaxed; although, at the same time, the conditions must be wide enough to embrace all that is best and most worthy of note in our national life and history.

There is hardly a more fascinating way of approaching the study of history than by gaining familiarity with the actual appearance of the men and women of a given time, and endeavouring to read something of their character from their faces. Not only their faces, but the fashions of their dress, and the way in which they were painted, help to make them more real and living to us. When we get a notable period illustrated by a great artist the charm is complete. Witness, for example, the superb Vandyck Exhibition at the

Grosvenor Gallery four years ago, where we saw as in a mirror the Royalist side of the Civil War. We cannot hope for so comprehensive a picture of any period here as yet, though the literary history of the present century finds a remarkably full and brilliant record; but, taking one or two well-known names, we may group together some portraits connecting themselves with each, and so gain some idea of the value of the gallery as a whole.

If we give place to the ladies, Mary of Scotland and Elizabeth of England at once suggest themselves; but we shall have to admit that our gallery necessarily pales before the glory of the Elizabethan room at the Tudor Exhibition of last year, and the rare collection of her rival's portraits in the Stuart Exhibition of the year before. Still, from the copies of the Janet and Oudry portraits, the medallion of Primavera, and the electrotype from the beautiful effigy at Westminster, we may form some notion of Mary's perplexing personality; while the effigies of Darnley and his mother, and the portraits of Knox, of the Queen's mother, Mary of Lorraine—the Fraser-Tytler portrait, long thought to represent Mary herself—of the boy James the Sixth, and of old Buchanan of the "Detectio," serve to give life and colour to the stormy days of her reign. Elizabeth we see, pale and haughty in comparative youth; pale and severe in later life; old and ill-favoured on the defaced coin the original of which is at the British Museum; majestic in her last repose in the effigy from the Abbey. Of the men who filled her "spacious times," whose portraits we can study, may be named Leicester and Essex, Burghley and Cecil, Raleigh and Hunsdon, Nicholas Bacon and Sir Thomas Gresham, the Earl of Cumberland, wearing the Queen's glove in his hat, Shakespeare's Southampton, and, above all, Shakespeare himself.

If we pass on to the Commonwealth, we find Walker's fine portrait of Oliver Cromwell, in which the sternness of the face, with its keen eyes, is accentuated by the severe simplicity of the armour in which the figure is entirely clad; while this is contrasted so happily with the soft grace of the fair-haired boy in red, who bends to tie his master's scarf. Compare this with the portraits by unknown artists, with the bust by Pierce, and the bronze bust by an unknown sculptor, and we shall have perhaps a more vivid idea of the great Protector than before. In Ireton, John Howe in his earlier years, John Owen,

Bulstrode Whitelocke, Milton, Andrew Marvell—though the somewhat ill-favoured portrait here represents him in later life—we see some of the notable men with whom Oliver surrounded himself. Harrington, of the "Oceana," whose interview with Mrs. Claypole we remember; Anthony Ashley Cooper, with his refined, handsome face; Walker's own keen, able face, as portrayed by himself, help to fill up the picture, though we miss, amongst others, Mrs. Claypole herself, Richard and Henry Fleetwood and Fauconberg, Warwick and Thurloe.

It would be tedious to follow this plan through the later Stuart reigns and those of the Georges; but the record of the present century is, as we have already hinted, so brilliant that it demands a few words. Here, to name a few only, are Charles Lamb, painted by Hazlitt, and Keats; Leigh Hunt and Byron; Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth; Sir Walter Scott, painted in his study at Abbotsford, and sketched by Landseer; Wellington in early life and in later years; Edward Irving, with a face intense in its spiritual earnestness; Arnold, of Rugby; Frederick Denison Maurice, Carlyle, and Darwin; Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; Lawrence, Outram, and David Livingstone. Bust and painting and pencil sketch are all pressed into the service, and the result is of the highest interest and value.

There is a small, but choice collection of autographs, from which we may single out an Admiralty order, signed by our friend Samuel Pepys, whose portrait, in his brown "Indian gowne," holding his "musique" of "Beauty, Retire," referred to by him on several occasions with much complacency, is here; a receipt for two hundred and fifty pounds, to which Nell Gwynn has, with some difficulty, affixed her straggling initials; an interesting note in which Mrs. Siddons "takes the liberty to inform" a young aspirant to the stage, "that, although she herself has enjoyed all the advantages arising from holding the first situation in the drama, yet, that those advantages have been so counterbalanced by anxiety and mortification, that she has long ago resolved never to be accessory to bringing any one into so precarious and so arduous a profession"; and a summons to attend the Queen's Coronation, in which Her Majesty's signature, with far more character than those of her immediate predecessors, is seen to have already that firm, yet flowing style by which it is still distinguished.

One or two remarks suggest themselves in conclusion. The electrotyping of the Royal effigies at Westminster, at Gloucester, and at Canterbury, was an admirable idea which has been admirably carried out. But there are many monuments of eminent English men and women scattered through different churches of the country, which a chance fire or other calamity may destroy, or an unskilled attempt at restoration may irretrievably injure. It would seem very desirable that a few of the most notable of these should be electrotyped and added to the gallery, as opportunity offers. And there are a few more perishable memorials still to be found here and there, in the shape of portraits in coloured glass, such as the rare portrait of Prince Arthur Tudor, in the Priory Church, of Great Malvern. Accurate drawings of these, in a safe and accessible place, would be of the highest value to the historical student, and would find a fitting home in a National Portrait Gallery.

It would seem ungracious to say a word in disparagement of the catalogue, a monumental work in the completeness of its information, whether descriptive or biographical. Perhaps it is owing to the limited accommodation and the temporary nature of the arrangement at Bethnal Green, that it is not so easy to consult in connection with the portraits themselves, as one might wish. In the new gallery there will be a great opportunity for arranging and grouping; but it is difficult to devise a really satisfactory treatment of a catalogue which is constantly being rendered incomplete, by the addition of fresh portraits of all periods.

There are, of course, many blanks to be filled up as time and opportunity serve. Even within the last few years, there are names as yet unrepresented, which spring at once to the pen, and to which none could deny a place on the roll of England's worthies. Such are the names of Charles Kingsley, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Charles George Gordon, Robert Browning, and John Henry Newman.

NOTE.—Since the above was written, the thirty-fourth annual report of the Trustees shows that out of the five names last mentioned, two, Rossetti and Gordon, have been added during the past year.

HIS LAST EXCURSION.

THE announcement of the last excursion of the season, "see small bills," comes as something of a surprise. It was but the

other day that the first of the season was announced, the harbinger of the summer that we hoped to have, and suggestive of all kinds of plans in the way of visits to all sorts of places. And now with the programme still unfulfilled, it has come to the last of the season. Harry means to go anyhow, his governor was there last week and had a splendid time; music all the way down, two full troupes of nigger minstrels, and the strongest half of a brass band; when they got there a first-class regatta on, and coming home, the liveliest party as ever was, with dancing on all the railway platforms they stopped at, and all so free and pleasant, that the old man was never so much pleased in his life before. This, no doubt, was an ideal excursion which we can't expect to attain again in a hurry: still with a fine day and a bit of sunshine, a sniff of the briny will be no bad thing, opines Master Harry.

Our excursion involves early rising. If it were not the last of the season, we would put it off till another occasion, for the wind "soughs" through the darkness of night in a melancholy way, and a dusky mixture of dawn and moonlight shows a canopy of thick clouds overhead, and driving raindrops are felt every now and then. On the way to the station, the street lamps are being extinguished one by one, prematurely as it seems, for there is not much daylight to boast of—and through the gloom sounds the continuous tramp of heavy footsteps, and working men, young and old, are seen on the march, with loose baggy garments slung on anyhow, and spare coats over their shoulders, and cans and bundles of grub hanging on here and there. The first morning train is waiting for us all, and it presently deposits a goodly contingent at King's Cross, the bulk of us connected with ladders and scaffolds, and the building trade generally; but one or two more lightly equipped and intending for St. Pancras, and the last excursion of the season.

At St. Pancras, the Terminus is just struggling out of its night's repose. Milk-cans—"churns" is the technical word, by the way; but, anyhow, churns or cans are doing a considerable deal of clanking, and early local trains are discharging a few loads of passengers who clear off with speed, intent on being "on time" at shop or factory; the porters are sweeping up the platforms. There is a kind of pitter-patter on the window-frames of this extensive structure, that suggests a downpour outside.

Altogether not a propitious outlook for the last of the season. But there is comfort in reflecting that we may find better weather at the other end. For our destination is the Norfolk coast, the west coast of Norfolk if you please, for it has a west coast, whatever sceptics may say to the contrary, and on that coast stands Hunstanton; whence, on favourable occasions, you may see the sun sink glowing into the salt sea waves. And to go to Hunstanton and back for four shillings, which is what we are promised on the small bills, considering that the place is more than a hundred miles distant from where we stand, is a marvel of cheap travelling, anyhow.

But there is another train to go before ours, and this a real midland excursion—to Birmingham and back in the day, for five shillings. Such places as Birmingham are independent of the weather, for as nobody is likely to go there in sheer lightness of heart and for the pleasure of the thing, so no one having reason to go there is likely to be deterred by a little rain. And thus Birmingham, on wheels, is pretty thickly inhabited already, and people are still hurrying up.

By the time Birmingham is disposed of, Hunstanton is ready to take its place. There is no great crowd at present to take advantage of the last of the season; that last shower sent many intending passengers to bed again. Even Harry may be looked upon as a doubtful starter, for there is nothing that damps his ardour so much as a smart shower of rain. But he arrives just at the last moment, and gets in as the train is gliding away. Harry is radiant in light grey tweed, with a cap of the same on the back of his head; but he is not in his usual radiant spirits. Monday morning, he explains, has followed too close upon Sunday night, and he is more disposed to sleep than to rattle on in his usual cheerful manner.

Our excursion train has a good deal to say at the small suburban stations that thickly line the route, each of which has a few passengers for us, who are sanguine about the weather, and make sure that it is going to clear up presently. But after leaving Tottenham the train frisks along, putting on speed as it goes, and we have only a glimpse of Broxbourne, on one of the prettiest reaches of the River Lea, and with an ideal "Anglers' Rest," where Isaac Walton might still feel himself at home, notwithstanding the changes that have passed over his favourite waters. And

Rye House should be close at hand, with its associations of ancient "plot" and modern bean-feasts. But the railway takes a turn to the right, leaving the vale of the River Lea for that of the Stort, and the train almost comes to a stop as it rumbles slowly past the station of Burnt Mill. About the mill and when it was burnt there is nothing definite to be gathered; but Harry is now awake, and surveys the placid rural scene, where the channel of the quiet little River Stort is marked out by an irregular line of willows. Here was the scene, he explains, only yesterday, of one of the funniest games that ever was played upon the inoffensive brethren of the angle. The Stort, it seems, is a favourite resort of many of the metropolitan angling clubs, and the last Sunday of all was fixed for a grand international tournament, and some three hundred competitors came out betimes to dispute the prize. But when they reached the river-bank no river was there. It had disappeared in the night—the water drawn off by an irate proprietor. "Some of those red-tiled roofs," said Harry, indicating farm buildings in the distance, "might have lost their covering, but that a strong force of county police were on the ground to keep the peace." The notion of running the river dry rather takes the fancy of the company, and suggests an anecdote about a man who, in his cups, undertook to drink the sea dry. "I'm on for the sea," he says, when they brought him down to his work; "but I don't undertake the bloom-in' rivers." And, as the other party could not stop the rivers, the man took the cake after all. The story is as old as Egypt; but it comes in quite freshly here, and brings us along cheerfully to Bishop's Stortford, where everything is as quiet and rural as can be imagined, with a few cattle-trucks in a siding, suggestive of cattle-markets and fat and lean kine.

A rich and peaceful country lies around us, with the square embattled towers of churches showing here and there among the trees. Here is a village which boasts its own little station, an ancient church, a green castle mound, and red-tiled roofs moss-grown and lichen-covered; but the village does not concern itself with us, and we run on into a more bare and open country, where the white chalk gleams upon us from cuttings here and there on the hill-side. We pass through quite a deep cutting of hard grey chalk,

which, says a fair and an imaginative passenger, reminds her of Matlock. But for the cutting we might have a glimpse of the stately old Tudor mansion of Audley End.

Coming out into the open here are wide corn-fields stretched before us—the harvest all cleared by this time—and with hundreds of gleaners at work scattered in groups over the hill-side, that is all one great enclosure, without trees or hedges, and bounded only by the horizon. Copses are scattered here and there, where Master Reynard may find an asylum; and here and there a scanty flock of sheep is folded in some nook or corner with the shepherd and his dog in attendance, survivals of the days when all this corn land was grassy down—days which may come again unless things take a turn, says one knowing in agricultural matters.

Soon we are in the flat country again, with the broad flanks of the Gog Magog hills showing for a while behind us, a flat and fertile country, full of groves, and copses, and avenues of tall elms; and yonder is “willowy Camus” winding through the landscape, all bristling with pollards and green osier-beds. And Cambridge appears—at least, the name of it—but it might be any other place, with trucks, and sheds, and covered platforms, for all we can see of it—so insignificant are the surroundings of this ancient seat of learning. Now there is a straight run over the ancient fen, with only an occasional watercourse or deep-cut ditch to remind one that all this wealth of verdure and vegetation is dependent for its existence upon sea-banks, and cuts, and huge systems of drainage.

There is no need to ask where we are now. We are gifted for the moment with one of the brightest, most charming glimpses: a reach of river here, a barge or two, a bridge, a few clustered roofs, and, rising above all, the lofty tower and graceful traceries of Ely’s beautiful cathedral, majestic in form, fairylike in structure—a very dream realised in ashlar and freestone. Then we lose sight of Ely, and plunge again into the rich, fertile country, all ancient fen, and once the site of the last camp of refuge of the last of the free English, after the Conquest. This brings us to Lynn, of which one does not see much, although that little—the towers of churches, the masts of ships, the clustered buildings—gives a pleasing impression of the old fen seaport.

From Lynn we are backed into the branch line for our destination, with a wide marshy flat stretching on one side, while on the other is what must have been the coast in ages past—now bold rising grounds, conspicuously crowned with woods. Vast earthworks, of prehistoric date, lie among those clustering trees, and among the entrenchments rises the keep of the fine Norman castle, now a noble ruin. It is called Castle Rising, and there is an ancient distich current which testifies to its ancient importance. It was once the appanage of Isabel, the treacherous wife of Edward the Second; and here she lived, during a long period of her son’s reign, in a kind of honourable captivity.

On the other side we now get the gleam of the sea over the wide salt marshes, and the hulk of some vessel, cast away on the distant shore, shows against the bright horizon in quite portentous blackness. Portentously, too, does the wind whistle, and howl, and hum through every crack and crevice of our railway carriage, while sometimes a sharp, biting shower streaks the glasses with arrowy films. On the opposite side the woods look quite warm and pleasant by contrast—the sweep of pine-woods over the sandy knoll, with the neat gravelled drive winding over the brow. This is Wolferton, and the station for Sandringham, which lies on the further side of the sand-hills, nicely sheltered from all this howling blast. But the beauty of colouring on the hill-side, and on the mossy, moorish patches below, makes one forget everything else—the bonnie heather all in full bloom; the lichen, and mosses, and strange plants of all kinds, which spread orange and tawny carpets, touched with seams of gold. All this is as charming as unexpected, and a stray, straggling sun-beam lights it all up with a wonderful radiance that touches not the dark belt of pine-trees beyond.

Still over the flat runs our train, and over a single line now, and we have to pull up every now and then while some train from the opposite direction passes by. And all these trains are well filled. Rosy girls, and anxious mothers, and sturdy children appear, with baskets, pails, wooden shovels, and bundles of sand-shoes piled among them. These people are all coming away from the seaside, and they look out at us, who are going there, in mild astonishment, mingled, one fancies, with a little gentle compassion. Then we catch sight of a few houses, built of a ruddy-looking unhewn

stone—houses which at once transfer our imaginative lady traveller into the wilds of Yorkshire; but here, without further preamble in the way of suburbs, we are run alongside a platform, and here is Hunstanton.

My word! how the wind whistles in the rigging of our little crowd! How the skirts flap and crack in the breeze! There is a hillside covered with houses, built of the same warm-coloured unhewn stone—a comfortable settlement enough, but with no particular comforts to offer to us excursionists. A prim-looking iron pier stretches over the sands. Wet are the sands, the boulders wet, too, and slippery, the terraces swept by the wind. Harry curls up, and feels like a caterpillar. What about the toyshops, the articles of the beach, the little bazaars, the stalls full of nicknacks, the toy-boats and full-rigged ships? Everything that will fly away is stowed inside, and the proprietors eye us through their windows with the same air of mild compassion that we noticed about the retreating visitors. Bleak and cold gleams the white lighthouse on the cliffs. The red cliffs, with their caps of white chalk, are swept from end to end by the searching wind. There is angry, broken water beyond the sands. The boats at their moorings are shipping water by bucketfuls; some have already sunk; and there is some excitement in watching the efforts of their proprietors to retrieve such articles in the way of sails and oars which have been left in them. "Who's for a sail?" cries Harry, and volunteers to be one to man the life-boat if she will undertake the trip. Among the white sea-horses wide sands are showing their broad backs, and beyond, the dark coast of Lincolnshire runs out into the darker sea-line; on the horizon, a big screw steamer, three-parts out of the water, shows her huge bulk, panting and puffing out white steam, but making little headway.

"And this is the Wash!" cried Harry, surveying the scene. "It's beautiful weather for it, certainly, fine drying weather, only it's trying for the clothes-peg. Brings out the patent blue, though, don't it? Next time I'll do my little wash at 'ome!" Harry is bitterly sarcastic against the weather, the scenery, and everything, and lets out his feelings before a philosophical sailor man who is selling nuts, and who puts down his basket to argue the matter out.

"Now, look y're, sir," he cries, "you

can't expect to have all good 'uns, not even along of my nuts, you can't. And if you gets a crowd o' people, there's some good and some bad, and likewise with the weather 'tis the same, good days and bad 'uns."

Out of the mixture of good and evil, indicated by the philosophical nut-seller, there certainly comes forth a good dinner. They have prime beef and mutton down here. But the tradition of the Norfolk dumpling seems to have faded out of existence. The more familiar Yorkshire seems to have crowded it out of existence; anyhow at public tables, though, no doubt, it still survives in the domestic cuisine. But fortified and refreshed, Harry is once more disposed to enjoy himself, if he can get the chance. But the ministers of his simple pleasures are no longer here; the gay Bohemians all are fled. A band is announced for Wednesday evening, but that is of no use to us on a Monday. The pier is something of a desert, although the glazed enclosure at the end is a capital refuge against the biting wind. A family party are picnicking out here, the children career over the empty benches, and play imaginary overtures in the band-stand. A pair of young honeymooners are making eyes at each other. A young fellow, in rough sea-going rig, watches the angry waves that are playing battledore and shuttlecock with his little craft that lies out at anchor among the surf. And then the sun breaks out for a little while, and throws glorious gleams of light over breaking surf and wet sands, and the broad backs of shoals and sandbanks. The white lighthouse and the red and white cliffs gleam and glower in the sunshine, and the warm tints of the houses, and the vivid green of lawn and grassy slope come out in pleasant contrast. Girls are galloping their ponies over the sands, children paddle among the laughing ripples.

But great battalions of clouds are on the march, and with them is the wind that whistles and howls, and the driving shower with its keen biting drops. But, as Harry observes, it is fine drying weather, and the moisture of the shower is quickly carried off by the wind.

"And now, young gentleman," says the philosophic nut-seller, whom Harry has propitiated by the purchase of a pint of his wares, mostly good, but not warranted to be all good, "you'll go home, and say you've bin to Hunston; but you haven't, not yet. Hunston's about a mile and a half

further along." But Harry declares that this is Hunston enough for him, and declines to explore the country further.

Yet the walk to old Hunstanton, which is the real original settlement from which the sea-bathing town is an offset, is really a pleasant one; and over the brow of the hill, away from the sea, the air is quite mild and genial. The quiet country lane is warm, and sheltered with green hedges, where honeysuckle and bramble flourish, and wide fields opening out, and great stacks of yellow corn piled here and there. Then the village appears, which is warm and snug, too, with its red-brick cottages weathered and mellowed by the shine and storm of a few centuries. And here are gardens of the brightest and most luxuriant, still full of roses, and with a wealth of autumn flowers. Lower down a kind of ravine breaks away towards the sea, on the edge of which stands the coast-guard station, with its tall flagstaff and neat, whitewashed dwellings, which all look towards the sea over a broken, hummocky shore. The place looks quite an ideal one for smuggling; but that is all over now, and the population of the village seem to be more in the way of harvesting, stacking, and threshing, than in any seafaring business.

A pleasant lot of the infant coast-guard are clambering about the low wall and the palings of the station, and a young woman is playfully threatening them with the vengeance of the authorities. A tall, paternal-looking coast-guard is on the lookout with a long telescope, and judges the weather with an impartial eye. "There is too much wind for rain," he says, "to last; but we shall have showers, no doubt." And the shower part of the prophecy is abundantly fulfilled.

But the church is a refuge from wind and rain—the church that lies in a sheltered nook out of the way of all the trouble and turmoil of sea and shore. A handsome church, with a fine square tower, and generally a noble air about it. Close by the church is the Hall, the seat of the family of Le Strange, which, according to genealogists, has been there ever since the Conquest; and the chancel of the old church is full of family memorials in the way of brasses, monuments, and inscriptions. Everything now in the church looks bright and burnished; the brasses well polished, the marbles bright and glittering. The old Norman font is wreathed with white flowers, and the chancel glows with

the decorations for the harvest festival. The ladies who have been at the work have just finished their labours, and look tired enough; but the result is worth their labour and pains. All the fruits and flowers of the season have been deftly arranged in glowing trophies, that cast a radiance over the dim chancel, though the clouds above are dark and lowering.

Beneath a noble altar tomb in the very centre of the chancel, adorned with elaborate brasses, a whole family pedigree surrounding the central figure, lies Sir Roger L'Estrange—not the Sir Roger more or less familiar to us as the licenser of printing in the reign of Charles the Second, but his grandfather, probably. The father of our Sir Roger has a monument on the chancel floor with the punning inscription, "Hamo Extraneous Miles," an inscription probably prepared by Sir Hamo himself without any thought of humour, but considering himself indeed a stranger and pilgrim, even in his own land and among his own kinsfolk. In a satire on the licenser of the press, this Sir Hamo is described as the knight of the pulpit, and he seems to have been the author of several controversial works on the side of orthodoxy and authority in the civil and ecclesiastical contests that raged in his day. Sir Roger of the Press was his third son, a captain under Major Cartwright in the garrison at Newark, who conceived the rash plan of surprising Lynn for the King with a few bold fellows, but who was captured and barely escaped being hanged for his pains. But he is more interesting in later years under the Restoration as one of the earliest pioneers of the newspaper press. The "Public Intelligencer and News," which he started in 1663, was superseded after a time by the "London Gazette." But some years later he started another newspaper—the "Observer"—which had a more lengthened existence. Sir Roger was also a voluminous writer on many topics, but is best known to the general as the translator of *Æsop's Fables*. In the Rabelaisian satire upon the worthy knight, there is one passage of a little interest as referring to this particular church. "Climbing up a tree he espied, about two hundred leagues from him, the top of a steeple, which, by the cross on the top of it, he knew stood in the land of Norfolkshire, not far from his father's castle." There is no cross now, and no steeple, indeed; but whether at any time the square church towers, so common in Norfolk, were ever adorned with wooden steeples, and these

steeple terminated by a cross, is a question for the archaeologists of the county.

But we have no more time to linger in this pleasant sheltered nook. The day is drawing in, and the weather is getting worse instead of better, and there is abundant demonstration, despite the coast-guardsmen, that it is possible to have it blow hard and rain hard at one and the same time. All things considered, it is satisfactory to gain the shelter of the station roof without a thorough drenching.

As dusky darkness settles over the scene, the train for St. Pancras is made up, and it is pleasant to exchange the dripping gloom outside for the lighted carriages, cushioned and warm. Harry is in his seat in good time, but only recovers his spirits when the train is fairly on the move. There is little to be seen till the moon rises solemnly in a cloudy sky over the town of Lynn, and we agree that it was on such a night as this that the stern-faced men set out for Lynn, when Eugene Aram walked between. We have a capital run to London, and agree that, as far as the railway company is concerned, we could not have had a better finish of the season. "But you don't catch me out again," says Harry, "not beyond 'Ighgate 'Ill, till summer comes again."

CURIOUS RAIN SHOWERS.

CONTRARY to popular belief, clouds are not essential to the production of rain. Sometimes the rain may be wafted on the wind from a distance; but it may also be caused by the condensation of moisture, without its passing through the intermediate state of clouds. In the higher regions this vapour may become frozen, even without the semblance of a cloud, and descending to a warmer stratum, be again dissolved, dissipated, or precipitated. We have it on the authority of Sir J. C. Ross, that in the South Atlantic it rained on one occasion for over an hour when the sky was entirely free from clouds. In the Mauritius and other parts of the southern hemisphere, this is not a rare occurrence; but in Europe it is, and the greatest known length of its duration was ten minutes at Constantinople.

We find frequent mention, in old writers, of blood rain, which was supposed to fall only at rare intervals, and to portend some dire calamity. This is no other than red rain, which, with red snow, is a perfectly

natural as contradistinguished from a supernatural phenomenon, and is caused by various substances—plants, animalcules, and minerals—infinitely small, which, gathered into the air by the wind, mingle with the rain globules in such untold quantities, as to completely hide the original colour. Some years ago there fell a shower of red rain at Bristol, which, on examination, was found to derive its colour from the seeds of ivy-berries which fell with it. Pollen showers, vulgarly called yellow or sulphur rains, are comparatively common; some are the pollen of the Scotch fir; and one extraordinary fall of this kind of rain, which took place during the night, was phosphorescent, and greatly alarmed the beholders. One afternoon, we are told by Dr. Thomson, in his "Introduction to Meteorology," the wooded part of Morayshire appeared to smoke, and, for a time, fears were entertained that the fir plantations were on fire. A smart breeze suddenly got up from the north, and above the woods there appeared to rise about fifty columns of something resembling smoke, which wreathed about like waterspouts. The atmosphere now calmed, and the mystery was solved; for what seemed smoke was, in reality, the pollen of the woods. Readers of the "Origin of Species" will readily understand the importance of this distribution of pollen in the fertilisation of the fir-trees. Showers of "manna," like that, presumably, which saved the children of Israel in the wilderness, are frequent, and consist of an esculent lichen, which, in times of famine, has done good service in the preservation of a whole people. In 1815, a lake in the south of France suddenly became a patchwork of red, violet, and grass-green, which, on examination by Klaproth, was found to have been caused by myriads of various coloured animalcules.

Black rain is another curious phenomenon, which has not yet been properly and adequately explained. There fell, on the twenty-third of November, 1819, a remarkable black shower at Montreal, accompanied by appalling thunder. The fall had been preceded by dark and gloomy weather over the whole of the States and Canada, and, when Montreal itself was visited, the whole city became dark; the atmosphere appeared as if covered with a thick haze of a dingy orange colour, and the rain which fell had a thick and dark inky appearance, and seemed to be impregnated with some black substance resembling

soot. The first visitation was made on a Sunday; on the day following, the weather became clearer; but on the Tuesday a heavy damp vapour with a black pall enveloped the whole city again, and it became necessary to light the candles and lamps in all the houses. "The appearance," says a writer, "was awful and grand in the extreme." A little before three o'clock a slight shock of earthquake was felt, and a noise resembling the distant discharge of artillery was heard. It was now that the increasing gloom engrossed universal attention. At twenty minutes past three, when the darkness seemed to have reached its greatest depth, the whole city was instantaneously illuminated by the most vivid flash of lightning ever witnessed in Montreal, immediately followed by a peal of thunder so loud and near as to shake the strongest buildings to their foundations; and this was succeeded by other peals, and accompanied by a very heavy shower of rain of the colour above described. After four o'clock the heavens began to assume a brighter appearance, and fear gradually subsided.

Showers of snow and earth have been numerous; but showers of flesh, fish, frogs, etc., of which every sailor can tell stories, are worth noticing, as being of more infrequent occurrence. The flesh was recognised as a distinct substance by Schenchzer, about the beginning of the last century, and its true animal nature was shown by Lemonnier, in 1747. It is said to have borne a greater resemblance to mucus than to gelatine or tannin; but it does not exactly agree with any of these. It is unctuous, greyish-white, and, when cold, inodorous and tasteless; it is soluble in warm water, and then resembles thin beef-tea. In South America an area of country forty-three miles square was, on one occasion, found strewn with fish; and on another occasion, in England, at a considerable distance from the sea, a pasture field was found scattered over with about a bushel of small fish. Herrings fell in 1828 in Kinross-shire; and instances of other similar falls are legion. At Ham, in France, a M. Peltier, after a heavy rain had fallen, found the square before him covered with toads. "Astonished at this," he tells us, "I stretched out my hand, which was struck by many of these animals as they fell. The yard of the house was also full of them. I saw them fall on the roof of a house and rebound from thence to the pavement. They all went off by

the channels which the rain formed, and were carried out of the town." There is something of an apocryphal air about the latter part of this experience; but the phenomena of flesh, fish, and fishbone showers are reasonable enough. The fish are taken up into the air in a waterspout, borne along by the currents, and dropped, it may be, some hundreds of miles away, just as dust, containing small animals and plants, is gathered up near the Amazon and dropped on some vessel passing the Madeira or the Cape de Verde Islands.

Showers of hailstones of a great size are common; but perhaps the few instances which we give here are not so well known, and will therefore bear relating. In England, in 1202, hailstones fell "as large as big eggs," to use the words of the old chronicler. At the end of the seventeenth century some were found measuring from eight to fourteen inches in circumference; and in Scotland, in 1269, "there rose great winds with storms of such unmeasurable hailstones, that manie towns were thrown down by their violence, and fires spread throughout the kingdom, burning up steeples with such force of fire, that the belles were in divers places melted." In the Orkney Islands, in 1878, hailstones were gathered as large as a goose's egg; and in 1822 men and animals were killed by them on the banks of the Rhine. The most extraordinary hailstone on record, however, is that said by Heyne to have descended near Seringapatam, towards the close of Tippoo Sultan's reign; it was as large as an elephant! This is a great attempt on one's credulity, and, after it, perhaps we had better come to a close.

CATHERINE MAIDMENT'S BURDEN.

A STORY IN TWELVE CHAPTERS.

By MARGARET MOULE.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT, having finished her after-dinner nap, was coming slowly down the stairs at the Castle on the following day. She was wondering what she could do with herself during the hour that lay between her and tea-time. Experience had taught her that time spent in looking for her daughter was likely to be time wasted. Grace was never to be found when she was wanted, and, from the fact

that she had, at lunch-time, mentioned no definite plans for the afternoon, her mother inferred that they were, probably, privately well matured. She was not afraid for Grace, to-day. She thought the sobering effect of yesterday's accident would keep her from any very daring action in the immediate future, and Captain Carnforth being out for the day, on a long expedition, in company with Mr. Dare, her mind was completely at rest, and all the more at leisure to try and devise occupation for herself.

The other two guests—Mrs. Kenyon and Miss Neville—had retired, after luncheon, to the drawing-room, each with a book. Mrs. Arbuthnot would, however, have ruthlessly interrupted their literary pursuits if she had not felt considerably disinclined for conversation with Mrs. Kenyon or chatter from Miss Neville.

So she refrained from approaching the drawing-room, and stood looking around her in the hall in a somewhat doubtful and depressed frame of mind. As she did so the outlook from the front door caught her eyes, and, with a sudden determination that she would take a little fresh air, Mrs. Arbuthnot took up a sunshade that she had laid in the hall on returning that morning from a drive, and went out alone into the grounds.

She had not gone more than a hundred yards after leaving the gardens when the sound of quick steps behind her made her start, and Mr. Stewart-Carr came up to her.

He had been unavoidably absent all the morning on business connected with a political meeting, in which he was expected to take a prominent part, in the small county town near Moreford; and none of his guests had seen him since breakfast-time.

"My dear Mrs. Arbuthnot," he said, as he reached her, "are you making a lonely tour of my grounds? I am very sorry not to have been at hand sooner; but I was detained very much longer than I expected. Now I am on the spot may I accompany you? I can point out accurately all their defects and all their attractions," he ended, laughingly.

Mrs. Arbuthnot saw, in this unlooked-for appearance of Mr. Stewart-Carr, a most happy dispensation of Fate. The hour before tea would now no longer be tedious; and with a quick turn of thought, that was instinctively if unconsciously diplo-

matic, she decided that this hour might be well used by her to help forward what she mentally called "Grace's interests": in plain words, her own cherished scheme of marrying Grace to Mr. Stewart-Carr.

So she welcomed him very graciously, and acceded to his proposal still more graciously.

"Don't overtax an old woman's walking powers, that is all I ask," she said, smiling; "you young men are so alarmingly athletic."

He answered her by some complimentary and deprecatory words, and proposed to her that they should take their way towards a higher part of the park, which commanded a good view of the whole; and they set out across the shady slopes together.

"Whereabouts was it that dear Grace fell yesterday?" said Mrs. Arbuthnot, after a short pause, during which she had been carefully considering how to introduce the subject of Grace most adroitly and most quickly; and had come to the conclusion that direct methods, after all, were the most simple and satisfactory.

"Oh, nowhere near here," he answered. "On quite the other side of the park. It was near the White House—the house you catch sight of from the drive." Then, turning round to her, "I do hope," he went on, "that Miss Arbuthnot is not feeling any bad effects this afternoon. I hope she is still as much recovered as she felt this morning."

"Oh, yes, thank you," Mrs. Arbuthnot said, with an ease as complete as her agitation of the day before. "She is quite well again; the shock has entirely passed away. But," she added, more gravely, "it might not have been so. Dear Grace is so terribly reckless; I trust this may be really a serious warning to her."

"I blame myself greatly," Mr. Stewart-Carr went on, "for having such a horse as Queen Bess in my stables. I have meant to part with her for months; but you know how one puts off these things, and I never wrote or gave the order. I heartily wish I had. One has no right to keep dangerous animals."

"Indeed, Mr. Stewart-Carr, it is not you who should blame yourself. What more could you do than warn Grace? Indeed, if I remember, you refused to let her mount the horse."

"Yes; I refused," he said, with a smile. "Grace has, I hope, told you that she is quite aware of her recklessness and

defiance in taking it," Grace's mother said, eagerly.

"Oh, yes," he replied, lightly. "We've quite settled all that. We had it out after breakfast this morning."

Very much encouraged by the thought of the understanding between the two which his last words seemed to imply, Mrs. Arbuthnot began to enter more directly on her subject.

"Grace is always very penitent after her rash acts," she said; "and thoroughly ready to own herself in the wrong."

"I am sure of it," he answered, warmly.

"And I often feel the recklessness will soon wear it itself out, with a little more experience."

"Doubtless," he replied.

"Grace's character is really a fine one in its way," she went on, musingly. "All she needs to develop it is a firm hand. I do not give her all she needs in the way of advice and control, I know well."

Mr. Stewart-Carr did not answer. He perfectly understood the somewhat undisguised nature of this criticism. He knew that Mrs. Arbuthnot meant to let him see clearly that, if he intended to propose to Grace, he need fear no discouragement; rather, he would receive the warmest encouragement. And he knew well, in his own mind, that to propose to Grace was just what he did intend to do. But yet this openly expressed encouragement did not give him the strong sensation of pleasure which it might well have been expected to give. He thought over the words vaguely; then he flicked at a fern with his stick in passing; and all at once the sun seemed to him very hot, and he thought of the thick, heavy shade under the Maidments' mulberry-tree. It was just at this time yesterday, he thought, that he had been sitting there. Then, suddenly becoming aware that Mrs. Arbuthnot's words demanded some sort of comment, and that his silence was, to say the least of it, uncourteous, he pulled himself up quickly, and turned to her.

"I—beg your pardon," he said. "I must have seemed very rude. I really do not know how it was, but I was thinking."

Mrs. Arbuthnot did not mind his erratic response, and she by no means minded his "thinking." The more thinking that he indulged in the better, she thought, if his thoughts were, as they certainly must be now, she told herself, with Grace.

She told herself also that it would be wiser to lay aside the subject of Grace for the present, in order to let what she had already said have its proper weight. So she reserved, for a future moment, a little list she had prepared for Mr. Stewart-Carr's edification, of Grace's admirers during the past season, and suavely followed his lead, when he, anxious to atone for his breach of courtesy, began hastily to explain to her the history of that part of the park in which they now were, telling her that it was believed to be the only remnant of an ancient forest. Mrs. Arbuthnot gracefully assumed an interest she certainly did not feel in the ancient forests of England; and while they talked of them their round of the park was completed by reaching the gardens once more.

On one of the smooth lawns, the turf of which looked like velvet, a table was spread for afternoon tea; and near it, trying to look as if their appearance there was unconnected with a longing for tea-time, were Mrs. Kenyon and Miss Neville. Mrs. Arbuthnot and Mr. Stewart-Carr joined them quickly.

"It's no use thinking of Dare and Carnforth," their host said; "I don't expect them till dinner-time, if then; so will you please give us some tea, Mrs. Arbuthnot?" But he suddenly looked round him, hastily. "Where is Miss Arbuthnot?" "Where is Grace?" exclaimed he and her mother, simultaneously.

"I have not seen Miss Arbuthnot since luncheon," said Miss Neville, emphatically. Miss Neville was "considered pretty," and was a little jealous of the superior effect made by Grace Arbuthnot's fresher, younger, more decided attractions. She and her aunt, Mrs. Kenyon, with whom she lived, were old acquaintances of the Arbuthnots, and had been asked to meet them at his house by Mr. Stewart-Carr with the intention of making a pleasant house-party. Outwardly he had succeeded admirably, for Miss Neville's feelings were hidden deeply within her own breast. She was far too wise to betray them by word or look.

"Grace ought to be in by now, wherever she may have wandered to," said her mother, a little anxiously, as she poured out the tea and handed to Mr. Stewart-Carr two cups, which he proceeded to convey to Mrs. Kenyon and Miss Neville.

"Shall I go and look for Miss Arbuthnot?" he said, coming back to

the tea-table and taking up a plate of cake.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Stewart-Carr," began Mrs. Arbuthnot; "but I don't like to give you that trouble."

"It is none," he said, handing the cake to Mrs. Kenyon as he spoke. "I shall have great pleasure. I will go directly I—"

But he was interrupted.

"There is Grace!" her mother exclaimed, suddenly. "Who has she got with her?"

Coming across a grassy slope, which, being fairly free from trees, was therefore well in sight, were two figures—those of Grace Arbuthnot and a tall man.

Miss Arbuthnot was walking rapidly along in an easy, graceful manner, with a long stick in one hand. The man carried a large basket. Mr. Stewart-Carr scrutinised the two for a moment, then, turning to Mrs. Arbuthnot:

"That is Mr. Maidment," he said—"my agent. It was he who picked Miss Arbuthnot up yesterday. I do not think you saw him at his house, though. He is one of the nicest fellows possible. I must go and speak to him."

"Mr. Maidment!" said Mrs. Arbuthnot. "He found Grace, did you say? Do, pray, bring him in and let me thank him. I was far too worried yesterday to thank any one properly—I am afraid I hardly said anything I should have said to Miss Maidment herself. Do, please, bring him in!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Stewart-Carr, moving away from the little group towards the gate, which he reached at the same moment as the other two.

A moment or two later the three crossed the lawn together. Grace Arbuthnot's white skirts were wet and muddy, her little sailor hat was tossed to the back of her head, and her general appearance more or less dishevelled and draggled. But she seemed unaware or unconscious of it, and without even observing Miss Neville's critical and rather withering glances, went up to her mother, and scarcely waited for the end of Mr. Stewart-Carr's introduction of Frank Maidment to say, with an irresistibly bright laugh:

"My dear mother, you must please be very grateful to Mr. Maidment. He picked me up yesterday, and he dragged me out of a pond to-day!"

Mrs. Arbuthnot looked helplessly from her daughter to Frank Maidment, and

then to Mr. Stewart-Carr, while Mrs. Kenyon and Miss Neville looked on in silent, and, in the case of the latter, somewhat sarcastic surprise.

Mr. Stewart-Carr came to the rescue.

"Sit down, Maidment, won't you?" he said, placing a chair for him near to Mrs. Arbuthnot. "And perhaps," he added, turning to Miss Arbuthnot with a smile, "you will go further into detail. Have you been on a poaching expedition in my preserves, may I ask, with Maidment as aider and abettor?"

"I got—into a hole," she said, with a laugh. "I never thought of poaching; I'll try that another day. It would be thrilling! I went to-day to try and get those water-lilies you showed us the other day. I thought I could, if I went by myself. But it was no good; I only got stuck in a muddy hole, where I couldn't reach the lilies or get myself out. Mr. Maidment came by at that moment; he heard my screams and rescued me! He also kindly carried home the basket. Now," she ended, with a pretty, impulsive gesture, "everybody knows everything, and may I have some tea?"

While Mr. Stewart-Carr carried her cup to Grace Arbuthnot, Mrs. Arbuthnot turned to Frank Maidment.

"I must tell you how sorry I am," she said, "for not having expressed my gratitude to you and to your sister, yesterday. The confusion of the moment must be my excuse. You will let me thank you now."

"There is nothing to thank me for," he answered, readily and courteously. "I am glad I happened to be at hand, and I am delighted to have been of any use."

"And will you please convey my best thanks to your sister?" Mrs. Arbuthnot went on. "I am most grateful to her for her care of my daughter."

"I am coming myself to thank Miss Maidment," put in Grace Arbuthnot.

"Indeed, she doesn't need thanks," he said, quickly. "But, at the same time, she will be delighted to see you."

"Maidment," said Mr. Stewart-Carr, approaching him with a cup in his hand, "you'll have some tea? Let me introduce you first, though, to Mrs. Kenyon—and Miss Neville."

As Frank Maidment took his cup, after having acknowledged the introductions, he gave a rueful glance at himself.

"I hadn't the least idea," he said to Mr. Stewart-Carr, "when you allured me

with the offer of tea, how muddy and unrepresentable I was. I apologise sincerely."

"You're not half so muddy as I am, Mr. Maidment!" cried Grace Arbuthnot.

"And you got muddy in a good cause, no doubt," added Mrs. Kenyon, with a little smile.

"I don't think you are dishevelled enough to apologise to me, Maidment," laughed Mr. Stewart-Carr. "And I am sure 'the ladies will'—indeed, they have excused you. Oh, you do take sugar," he was handing Frank Maidment the sugar as he spoke. "I'm thankful to find some one to keep me in countenance."

"You are in a minority?" said Frank Maidment, with a smile.

"My dear fellow, not one of these ladies takes any! I have heard them all refuse it each day, and I have each day felt more guilty in enjoying four lumps myself."

"My dear Mr. Stewart-Carr," said Mrs. Kenyon, "some one must support the sugar industry of the country, and we, of course, look to you to do it, as we, naturally, expect the stronger sex to take all trouble off our shoulders!"

"It's a trouble Mr. Stewart-Carr undertakes very readily," laughed Grace Arbuthnot. "And I believe Mr. Maidment also thinks it more of a pleasure," she added, turning to him with a saucy smile.

"I do," he said, returning her smile. "I confess it, frankly."

Mrs. Arbuthnot, who was not a person capable of appreciating even the simplest attempt at a humorous tone in conversation, had felt herself rather at a loss for the last moment or so, and therefore seized the little pause which followed Frank Maidment's words, as an opportunity to make a perfectly comprehensible, if somewhat uninteresting and irrelevant remark, on the character of the country round Moreford. And with this lead, the conversation for the next ten minutes became general. At the end of that time, Frank Maidment rose, and set down his tea-cup.

"I must be going," he said to Mr. Stewart-Carr. "I said 'two or three moments' to you just now, when you asked me in. I have let more than that go by, I think!"

"It's not late, Maidment," Mr. Stewart-Carr said.

"My sister will be looking for me, I think," he answered. And then he went on to take his leave. He came to Grace Arbuthnot last. "Good-bye," he said; "I

am very sorry I couldn't get at the lilies for you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Maidment," she said. "Don't mind the lilies. I'll take a boat next time! Thank you ever so much for being so clever in getting me out of the mud!"

He looked for a moment at her pretty, smiling face, as he took the hand she offered; then lifting his hat again, crossed the lawn to the gate accompanied by Mr. Stewart-Carr, while Mrs. Arbuthnot, aided by the other two, endeavoured to cross-examine Grace as to the details of her adventure.

An hour later, Mrs. Kenyon, Miss Neville, and Mrs. Arbuthnot had all gone to their rooms to dress for dinner. Grace, however, had not gone with them. During their walk to the Castle, Frank Maidment had incidentally spoken to her of the excellent fishing that was to be had in some of Mr. Stewart-Carr's trout-streams, and Grace, at the information, had become fired with a desire to fish them. She had completely forgotten the desire again, however, until they were all re-entering the house after tea, when it occurred to her mind, and then, turning suddenly round to Mr. Stewart-Carr, she had demanded, with the impulsive vivacity which, to him, made one of her greatest charms, to be thoroughly and instantly informed on the subject of his fishing, his fishing-tackle, his personal knowledge of the craft, and every possible detail connected with the idea. He had responded by proposing to show her the fishing-rods he possessed, and Mrs. Arbuthnot, only too glad to promote the desirable prospect of a tête-à-tête between them, had left them together in the hall.

"They are as old as the hills, I'm afraid," he said, as Grace, on her mother's departure, perched herself on the lowest step but one, and sat looking at him with her elbows on her knees, her face between her hands, and serious, considering eyes. "And they are all in my den. I don't dare say my study, for it's simply a little hole full of miscellaneous belongings, in a muddle. But, if you don't mind that, we'll have a look at them at once."

Grace assented eagerly, and he forthwith led the way to the room in question. It was an oddly-shaped little room. Part of it formed the first floor of one of the battlemented gateway towers, the rest ran out into the modern part of the house, and

was as light as the queer round part was dim.

Mr. Stewart-Carr shut the door, and proceeded to dive into the recesses of the round part, while Grace, after a curious glance round her, stood under one of the large windows in the lighter end, to await the result of his researches. He came to her in a moment with five or six fishing-rods. "I've got some better ones somewhere," he said, vaguely, presenting the best of the lot for her inspection, and setting the others down on a chair. "These are odd ones that I've brought here, and left here, and so on; and they're not improved by disuse. But I'll have that one done up for you, if it's light enough. Fenton shall take it into Molton tomorrow, and get it done."

"Oh, thank you!" Grace said, eagerly. "Then I could fish at once. I shan't catch anything, I know, but I'm dying to try. It's awfully good of you."

She gave him back the rod, with a quick little movement. Her face was bright with impulsive excitement, her eyes shone like a child's, with eagerness, and the dim background of the round part of the room seemed to enhance the fresh colouring of her face, and define every line of her pretty figure.

Mr. Stewart-Carr took the rod from her and put it in a corner near the door, then he put the others back into their place. He came rather slowly back to the window, watching Grace Arbuthnot intently as he did so.

She had leant her elbows on the sill and was looking out with a soft expression in her eyes, and a little expectant smile on her lips.

Mr. Stewart-Carr felt an odd sensation as he looked at her. This, he told himself, was the woman he intended to make his wife. He had firmly decided that with himself, and nothing stood in his way, nothing remained but to ask her. He believed she would say yes to him. He had tried, as he had resolved, in the library the day before, to show her what he wished and hoped, and he had fancied

she understood. At least, she had seemed to him, in some undefinable way, far more approachable to-day. And now he had before him an opportunity fitting in every way. They were alone; they were not in the least likely to be interrupted; and she was apparently in a softer and more emotional mood than was often the case with her.

He determined—and the decision gave him a kind of thrill as he made it—that he would settle his fate and decide his destiny, now, at this moment.

He came close to Grace Arbuthnot. She did not move. She was still gazing out of the window.

"Miss Arbuthnot," he began. She turned slowly from the window at his voice. But then he could say no more. The words he had arranged suddenly stuck in his throat. Something, he did not know what, made him suddenly pause. He looked at her; but no words would come. He could not go on. There was no hurry after all, he thought. On second thoughts, he would wait—wait a day or two longer. "I—don't you think we had better dress for dinner?" he stammered.

Grace Arbuthnot did not seem to have noticed anything strange in his manner. She seemed to recall herself, though, at his words.

"Oh, yes," she said, with a smile. "It must be dreadfully late."

She passed swiftly out of the door he opened for her. But she must have dressed with unusual quickness, for it was still a quarter of an hour to the dinner hour when she came quietly into the empty drawing-room and ensconced herself in a window with a book. She did not read it, however; for her eyes were constantly turned anxiously to the door, as if expecting some one. It opened suddenly, in a few moments, and Captain Carnforth came in.

"I hoped I should find you here," he said, in a low tone. "I thought Dare and I were never going to get back."

"So did I—I mean—so did we," she said, correcting herself, with a bright blush.

NOTE.

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